

## Transcription - Don't Forget the Customer

Welcome back I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, this is Inside Exec. Today, we're going to look at the subject of inverted commas, don't forget the customer. And Fulyana is going to introduce us to her thoughts on this.

How did this come about? It's by working with different people as you know, and people are being very, very focused, which is a good thing, on going back to how to deal with the current situation with the covid situation, how it's continuously changing, how to have a work environment that is suitable for return or hybrid teams or people who will come in the office sometimes and what they want in others. I'm hearing good thoughts by the leadership of organizations. I'm hearing fantastic contribution by the staff and meeting both needs.

What seemed to be less top of mind and less visible in the discussion is how does this affect the customer?

What about my customer? Which is nearly at every meeting before, at every opportunity customer were considered and they talked about the customer all the time. I don't think it's intentional, I think it is survival and making sure that they are there and invest in the best environment to serve the customers. So yes, it's implied, but I feel that what we need to do is bring it to the front again and what we need to do is say, well, the customer's going through different experiences where they used to ring us. Should we go after them with information? Have we got adequate resources for immediate response? Lots of organizations are not answering phones. So for good reasons in some case lots of organizations push you online. But there's some things that need to be discussed. So I'm thinking, what I'm encouraging people to do is continue to do what you're doing, but make sure you bring the customer into the heart of that discussion, listen to your staff and listen to feedback from customers and bring them in.

Another aspect that would be a contributor to this is when people were working in an organization face to face and there was the anecdotal ways of learning what customers want. You bumped into someone in the corridor, they might be from sales or marketing and you tell him, I'm surprised that customers hate or customers love what we just did. That sort of feedback was given to someone who might work in operations or the telephone service or whatever. And in that sense, you're constantly knowing what the customer thinks, what the customer feels and what we're doing about it as an organization. You get the opportunity to informally say, yeah, well I talk to customers all the time and I'm noticing this and all of that stuff that you learn by interacting casually. We need to make up for that

in a way and talk about it a bit more, have some sort of communication at every meeting maybe or every time just to hear what's happening.

It's interesting that it's the communication style I think, because if you look at how we're getting information across the board about a project, what other teams are working on or where we fit in the scheme of things, it's far more formalized now in terms of, it's a meeting, so it's online. So paperwork goes out where before it might just have been something that came through as an instant message on your machine that said you remember that or a calendar reminder that said the meeting is happening on this date. And there was, in a sense, it was more relaxed. The communication and the interaction was definitely more relaxed when you were in person to the way it is now and we've developed over the past two years a persona that says this is how I appear for online meetings. And this is the way I present my information, this is the way I get the information back.

I think the idea of having a session in each of those meetings where you actually say, well this is the time where we're turning the recording off where someone will keep minutes, but we're not going to record every word that you say. So it won't be there for posterity, we can't use it against you, but we really want to sit down and talk and have someone who's going to start that discussion because otherwise you just sit back and look at one another and think, well, I'm not going to be the first one, no different to being in a room, but have someone who starts that, who says I just want to share that I heard this or this happened.

The other part that concerns me is engaging the customers because they have had less opportunity to communicate with organizations. And if I just look at the supermarkets here that send you a letter from the CEO and say we go back to sort of mid 2020 when we're all in a state of confusion, really wondering about what was happening and where we were and where everything was changing around us. And it was a scary time. And it has remained scary for all sorts of reasons. But I would see those emails come through and I'd think, well that's good. I'll read that now. I had one come through yesterday and I thought I'm not interested, I don't care, I don't care what he's got to say, I'm not going to give him any feedback and I didn't even open it.

So what has happened in my mind in terms of a customer with that organization in that essentially two years, why do I feel disengaged from what they're doing or what they're saying or what they're asking me to do? You know, there's no way I give them feedback and I guess that's my answer is that regardless of the feedback, I don't think they'd take any notice whether it's good or bad.

Now I had an occasion, towards the end of last year where I went into, physically went into a store and it was a time where we had a new lot of restrictions introduced. So the staff were under pressure, you had to show your certificates and you had to check in and you had to show everything before you could get into the store. And the young girl, I would say that probably under 25, interacted with her and she did such an extraordinary job in a position that she couldn't possibly have been trained for well enough to understand what was going to happen, how rude people can be, how much they blame these poor young things and they think they can berate them because they're young so that they are disrespectful in that sense.

But I was so impressed with her that I wrote to the organization and said, I just want to say this is the first time I've interacted, she really handled the whole situation, what is a stressful situation well and I want her to know and I want the organization to know. I'm still waiting for a response. Not even an acknowledgement that I sent the email, so that you know, as organizations, if you are getting something from a customer these days, it is 10 times more important. It's the tip of the iceberg.

So if one person says that, there's 99 who are not saying something and you need to look at the bottom of the iceberg, you need to find some way of floating that iceberg higher in the customer ocean so that you can get some feedback. And it's not going to be by asking them. It's not going to be by saying, you know, if you want to tell us good or bad about your customer experience on the website, then fill in this form. That's not going to engage people if you haven't got a system that responds to that.

And I know I've talked about that ad infinitum. We've talked about getting your communication right for your customers. It is far more important these days than it ever has been to get that interaction happening.

That's a really good example of where the customer is not top of mind when it should be treated as gold in the information for you. Giving feedback. The other bit is really, it's not even done internally. I know the priorities have to shift and I know everybody is under enormous pressure, but as you just said, there's some people that have to face new experiences and deliver a service that they haven't had the opportunity to be trained for because of the speed of things happening. So the frontline staff, whether they're customer interacting, whether face to face or not, have not been helped by saying to them, look, everybody's under a lot of pressure.

So you're going to get rude customers. Now, we've seen that on the news where somebody was asked to show their certificate and they pushed the person nearly down an escalator. And so in that sense, that's not fair to those people doing those jobs and they need to be, again, not warned, but equipped to handle that. And to say to them, you're going to get customers, like what you just did Kim, that will appreciate, thank and give feedback. You have ones, no matter how well you do your job, they're going to be aggressive and horrible and all of that. It's not acceptable. But this is how we've got to deal with it and we will support you. And I think that's why I keep saying, don't forget about the customer because that can be good or bad. It's not just about the business and the money making and repeat business. It's about the whole experience and about the future and about your staff and about your reputation.

Also, it's about acknowledging how hard it is to get customers in the first place and how easy it is to lose them because there's lots of competition out there. And yes, we do say that there's business for everyone out there, but you want the customers who want you and you can't build customer loyalty, your brand loyalty without thinking about them, without making them part of your conversation. We're not saying, you know, the customer is always right because they're not but we are saying that you do need to have them as part of your community, your business community, otherwise you won't have business because without them you're just going through the motions. We're all subjected to the same changes in the environment. Obviously the customers are going through their own experiences.

So we want to keep tabs on what's their needs right now, how they changed, how they're feeling, how we can best do that. And that's why we keep talking about being agile or you've got to be agile in your response to that changed feeling, demand and expectation within the circumstances. You're going to get people cranky for not delivering within time frame because you can't get the goods to deliver or whatever reason.

So communication becomes even more important and the communication style is more important and then how to help that and building the relationships in those circumstances. Now there'll be a whole, I don't want to go into the covid detail, but I want to think about these relationships being built between medical professional, pharmacists and their customers by looking after them in relation to different things. So that's another opportunity where you would at least be telling your customers or the way you talk to them and and all of that. An opportunity shouldn't be missed, which at the moment I think it's hit and miss.

I think it's got to be honest communication because as we've heard a number of our guests talk about, there is increasingly a filter for information that comes to them about how much is spin, how much is just fluff and how much is protecting, you know, talking about the organization rather than them, the customer and the honest communication.

We take the logistics as an example. No, your package will be delayed. I don't know when it will arrive, but also the converse to that is not using Covid as the excuse. So no, we don't know when your package will arrive because there's so many things have happened with Covid that we can't just tell you. It doesn't need the rider. You know your business is important to us. We will get your package to you as quickly and efficiently as we can in the circumstances we all now find ourselves. So include yourselves in the situation. You know, it's not just about you're going to suffer because you're the customer and I have to look after my business. It's about we're all in the same boat. We're all in this together as the catchphrase goes without being condescending but being honest and without using excuses, you know, no proviso that gives the customer the feeling that they're not as important as the business situation.

I think we've probably covered that in sufficient detail. We've told you to make sure that you're thinking about your customers and particularly if it's me because I want feedback.

I will say that just one other thing that occurred to me in that conversation is that I have had one other opportunity. And as you know, I'm big on telling people what I think when it happens, good or bad because I just think that's a learning experience for them one way or the other. In terms of a supermarket now, there's another supermarket chain here who are so different to the mainstream ones that it's always interesting for me to see how they deal with these situations. And I had occasion to speak to the staff in store who were outstanding and always have been, you know, the personal face to face interaction with staff regardless of the store. So it's not just about the management of a particular store, they are really outstanding in terms of that marketplace and that environment. Same company had to deal with them online. Same situation took 10 days, nearly two weeks for them to respond to the email about the exact same situation.

And the online interaction gave me a rote answer. I thought, well, yes, I can understand that you're a big organization and you might have a lot of people contacting you through the website. But that's that's what you asked us to do. And if you haven't got someone who's monitoring that and answering that in a

timely fashion, then my confidence in your corporate responsibility is lessened and I'm more than happy to deal with the people in store regardless of where I go. But I won't ever contact you the way you want it via the website again. So just be sure that the customer interactions that you've got across the organization are held in the same light, held as the same importance. Just because you're not dealing with people face to face, doesn't mean that they don't deserve the same sort of interaction as they would get if you were in the room with them and had to respond straight away.

Alright, now that I've had my say we can finish there. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, this is Inside Exec.